

Message Text

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46

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-20 NSC-10 CIAE-00 PM-07 INR-10 L-03

NEA-10 NSAE-00 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 USIA-15

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----- 113354

R 291245Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5010

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

CONFIDENTIAL VALLETTA 2343

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MT

SUBJ: ILLNESS OF FINANCE MINISTER

1. BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER MORETON INFORMED AMBASSADOR THAT FINANCE MINISTER JOSEPH ABELA IS "EXTREMELY ILL" IN LONDON.

2. ABELA HAS A HISTORY OF BAD HEALTH AND WAS HOSPITALIZED IN LONDON FOR SOME WEEKS IN EARLY 1972. SHOULD HE DIE OR BE FORCED TO RESIGN, THERE WOULD ARISE THE ONE POSSIBLE CHANCE OF LOSS OF LABOR PARTY MAJORITY. MALTESE SYSTEM OF FILLING VACANCY IN PARLIAMENT INVOLVES NOT RPT NOT A NEW ELECTION, BUT A RECALCULATION OF THE PREFERENCES ON THE BALLOTS FROM THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION. IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED THAT ABELA'S SEAT IS THE ONLY ONE WHICH COULD POSSIBLY GO TO A DIFFERENT PARTY UNDER THIS SYSTEM. SOME NATIONALIST PARTY MEMBERS CLAIM THAT ABELA'S PERSONAL POPULARITY LED MANY NOMINAL NATIONALISTS TO GIVE HIM FIRST PREFERENCE ON THEIR BALLOTS WITH REMAINING BALLOTS GOING TO NATIONALIST PARTY CANDIDATES. WITH LABOR'S MAJORITY OF ONLY

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ONE VOTE, THE SHIFT WOULD GIVE THE SAME MAJORITY

TO THE NATIONALISTS.

3. COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND THAT NEVER HAS A CASUAL ELECTION
RESULTED IN A VACANCY BEING FILLED BY A CANDIDATE
OF AN OPPOSING PARTY. FOR THIS TO HAPPEN IN EVENT
OF ABELA'S DEATH, AT LEAST HALF OF HIS SECOND
PREFERENCES WOULD HAVE TO HAVE BEEN FOR A NATIONALIST
CANDIDATE. AN ANALYSIS OF VOTING TRENDS IN ABELA'S
FIFTH DISTRICT AT THE LAST ELECTION DOES NOT GIVE
EVIDENCE THAT THIS IS LIKELY. SECOND PREFERENCE VOTES
ALMOST INvariably WENT TO CANDIDATES OF THE SAME
PARTY. THE RESULTS WOULD NOT BE KNOWN UNTIL ABELA'S
VOTES ARE REOPENED, HOWEVER, BUT WE BELIEVE NATIONALIST
CHANCES OF GAINING HIS SEAT ARE EXTREMELY REMOTE. GETZ

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